2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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religious processions. The greatest concentration of ceremonies is around Easter. This cycle starts with the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on the Friday before Palm Sunday. Virtually all the inhabitants escort the statue through the principal streets of the village. This is followed by the Palm Sunday procession around the church square.[1] On Maundy Thursday there is a long service during which the parish priest washes the feet of twelve village laymen. Immediately after this the church is draped completely in black damask, and a huge wooden rattle replaces the church bells as a sign of mourning. On Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday in the morning, family groups visit the church and, passing before the statues depicting scenes from the Passion, stop to pray before the elaborate Sepulchre constructed in one of the chapels. Members of each of the village associations and clubs visit the Sepulchre in groups. Many families make pilgrimages to the churches in the twelve other parishes which hold Good Friday processions. At each one they offer prayers before the Sepulchre and pause to examine the statues and funereal hangings of their rivals before going on. All morning visitors from outside stream into Kortin to see the church. Then, at about two in the afternoon, there is a three-hour sermon on the Passion. This is followed by the Good Friday procession.

Old Manwel, the procurator, directs the procession. This is his big day. During the preceding weeks, he and Anton and Pawlu, the two men who take charge of decorating the parish for special occasions, worked very hard getting ready the eight statues, assembling the ornate Sepulchre and collecting the £90 required to meet the expenses of the Holy Week. Since he became procurator twenty years ago, Manwel has collected almost £3,000 for new statues, costumes, banners and black damask for the church. The procession itself lasts about three hours. Some 420 men and youths from the village carry and escort the eight huge statues. Some of the men have carried the same statue for years. The ten who carry the statue of the Crucifixion have protected their right to do so by a notarized contract with the parish priest. In return they have spent almost £200 over the past ten years to

[1] Instead of palm fronds, olive branches are distributed to the faithful. It is generally believed that if these blessed branches are burned, their smoke is particularly effective against the harmful effects of the evil eye. Farmers pass burning leaves through their cattle sheds, and I have met professionals who do the same to their salons before cocktail parties.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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796 the Canons of the Cathedral then says mass and the ceremony is over.

At the conclusion of this procession there is a scene of general confusion throughout the whole village of Zeitun. Priests, friars, *fratelli*, cross and standard-bearers, men and women of all classes, especially country people, and of these unfailingly the most recently married couples—all in their best attire and with a grand display of jewels and gold (*)—are seen going to and fro, buying and eating sweetmeats [493] and cheese cakes. Then again hundreds of all sorts of vehicles, from His

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• [675 584] (*) Till lately, young women residing in the country insisted before they were married on its being particularly stipulated in the marriage contract, that their husbands should take them to Casal Zeitun on St. Gregory's day, to Valletta on St. John's day, and to Boschetto on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, on the 29th of June.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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584 ness of the connection, without at all consulting the inclinations of their children.

[675] [431] [583] The articles of the contract having been settled, and the marriage portion agreed upon, the young man sent his intended bride a present consisting of a certain fish ornamented with garlands of ribband, with a ring or some costly jewel in its mouth.

The first interview was then fixed to take place in presence of the parents and their kinsfolk, best friends, and neighbours, who were regaled with sweetmeats and other refreshments.

[989] Before this meeting took place, the mothers of the two young people retired either into an arbour in the garden or some separate apartment, where they prepared a mixture of aniseed, aromatic plants, salt, and honey

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

will only be necessary for a "wise woman" or witch to spit on the hair while uttering a curse to bring misfortune upon the head which nourished it.

Grez will be careful not to laugh too heartily on a Friday—when the memory of the Crucifixion should make all sad. She will make the Sign of the Cross on leaving her house, on entering any vehicle or boat for no matter how short a journey, on cutting a piece of new cloth, before her baby's mouth when it yawns—so that evil spirits may not enter. On meeting a deformed or maimed person she will sign her corresponding limb or part of her body with the Cross.

When she brings flowers into her house she will be as careful to exclude the acacia as any West-country woman to avoid "may" or whitethorn, for the spiky Maltese acacia is the "thorn" of Palestine wherewith the Saviour was crowned.

These are but a few of the small ways in which the peasant woman pays a somewhat mixed homage to the Old Things as well as to the tenets of her Faith. In her favour it may be said that her "superstitions" are more logical than those of such folk who habitually "touch wood" or object to a third cigarette from one match.

THE FESTAS

The Festa, primarily a religious festival and a Holy Day of Obligation, provides the only relaxation for a hardworking and frugal people. Such simple pleasures as a meal of unaccustomed meat, a little wine, processions, and fireworks give full rein to the most lovable, childlike side of the national character. The importance attaching to these periodical holidays is well illustrated by an old rhyme:

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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THE SWEETHEART'S BARGAIN

In the marriage contract, they have it for a pact,
That he takes her to the Feste and sets her on a wall.
That he buys her cakes of sweetmeat, of the sort with hempseed made.
For that's the kind of sweetmeat a bride likes best of all.

It is believed that such a clause used actually to be embodied in the written contract drawn up by the parents and the go-between.

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Each little hamlet has its own feast, in honour of its own particular patron. Each has its own peculiar forms. Of the national feasts that of St. John naturally occupies a place of considerable importance. Certain aspects of its celebration, however, indicate that the Order of St. John was not alone responsible for the enthusiasm which this saint inspires. Busuttil, who has already been quoted at some length, writes of the Feast of St. John as follows:

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"Not unlike other nations, the Maltese are not indifferent in celebrating the Nativity of St. John by kindling great fires in the public streets, and giving their children dolls to carry in their arms on this day, in order to make good the prophecy respecting the Baptist 'Multi in nativitate ejus gaudebunt.'

Days and even weeks before this festival groups of children are seen going out into the country fields to gather straw, twigs, and all sorts of other combustibles which they store up for St. John's Eve.

On the night of June 23rd, the day before the festival of the Saint, great fires are kindled in the streets, squares, and market places of the towns and villages of the Island, and as fire after fire blazes out of the darkness of that summer night, the effect is singularly striking.

These fires are sometimes kept up for hours, being